

Medical guidance notes and information

Anthrax

Anthrax is caused by bacteria - *Bacillus Anthracis*. It is usually found in grazing animals, e.g. cows, sheep, goats, but can exist outside animals in the form of spores. Anthrax is spread by direct contact with spores e.g:

- Handling contaminated material such as infected animal hides;
- Inhaling spores;
- Ingesting/eating spores.

The incubation period for the bacteria is 1 - 7 days, but can be up to 60 days, depending on the degree of exposure.

Anthrax in humans is rare. **Anthrax is not transmitted from person to person.**

Signs and Symptoms

Cutaneous Anthrax (i.e. disease affecting the skin);

This causes symptoms of itching, especially on hands and forearms. This is followed by the appearance of an inflamed pimple that become swollen and weepy, and eventually becomes a black ulcer.

Inhalation Anthrax (i.e. after breathing spores);

A flu-like illness may follow inhalation of spores. This may be accompanied by fever, headache, muscle aches and a dry cough. These symptoms can deteriorate and cause respiratory failure and widespread infection.

Gastro-intestinal Anthrax (i.e. following ingestion of spores);

This is extremely rare.

Treatment

Anthrax can be treated with antibiotics.

Anthrax - Current Issues

Following the recent anthrax cases in the USA there have been worries regarding the deliberate release of anthrax into the environment. Despite recent scares it is important to note that there have been no confirmed cases in the UK.

Specific concerns have been raised regarding the risk of exposure to anthrax in post handlers. If you think you have handled or opened a package that may have been contaminated by anthrax:

- do not touch/smell or taste contents;
- place package in a sealed bag or container;
- shut windows in room;
- evacuate room and close door;
- switch off air conditioning;
- wash all exposed skin with soap and water if possible;

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- inform your manager, who will inform the emergency services.

IF YOU THINK YOU MAY HAVE COME INTO CONTACT WITH ANTHRAX AND HAVE ANY OF THE ABOVE SYMPTOMS THEN YOU SHOULD CONTACT YOUR GP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

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